A SUBALTERN'S MUSINGS

HAMISH MANN

A Subaltern's Musings

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A. James Ramm,

A SUBALTERN'S MUSINGS

BY

HAMISH MANN

(LUCAS CAPPE)

"My thoughts in this small booklet lie,
The windows of my 'inner eye.'"—H. M.

WITH PORTRAIT

London

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Norris Street, Haymarket

1918

Foreword

HAMISH MANN (2nd Lieut. A. J. Mann, 8th Black Watch). Born 5th April, 1896. Educated at George Watson's College, Edinburgh, and privately. Gazetted on 28th July, 1915. Drafted to France in August, 1916. Took part in the battles of the Somme and in the advance at Arras on 9th April, 1917—was seriously wounded by a shell while leading his platoon in the latter engagement, and died on the 10th *idem.*

From early childhood Hamish Mann, like Pope, "lisped in numbers, for the numbers came." His ear responded readily to the rhythmic flow of words, and as he grew to opening manhood his soul vibrated more and more to the whispering breeze, the babbling brook, the swaying flower, the smiling child, the loving heart of friend, and the inward voices that speak of the life beyond. To these he tuned his lyre.

"Songs [he wrote] are my life; my life's a song always,
Into my verse I pour my very soul."

Had he lived, this little book (most of it written in the trenches) would, in all probability, have been abridged or altered. His parents give it to the world in the hope that his friends will prize it, partly for its merits, but most of all for his sake, to whose memory it is dedicated.

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A Subaltern's Musings

To the Reader

My Muse—to me—is worthy and adorable,
But Love, they say, is blind :
So *you* may think her worthless and deplorable. . . .
Still, Reader dear, be kind !

The Ideal

I WOULD make the pulse of Life throb in my verse ;
I would have the ripple of the stream embodied in my music,
And the sudden distant song of a mating bird.
I would have the rhythmic and harmonious rattle of the grasshopper
Snatched from the Intangible, and placed for ever in my poems.
I would have the health, the bloom, the temperament of the newly married girl
Reflected for always in the deep mirror of my melody.
The very atmosphere that broods philosophically about a ruined house
I would have living in the chords of my Lyre.
I would myself be a kind of musical instrument,
Played upon by the fingers of Nature,
And giving forth faithful odes, lays, and dirges at her command.
I would have my strings tingle with rich passion,
I would make the very souls of men weep with my threnodies,
And sometimes I would have my own eyes melt with the infinitely dear sadness of my songs.

Persey, 30th June, 1915.

Dedication

(To Daphne)

Ah, Rosebud, in the fairest bloom of Youth,
Ah, Sunbeam, spotless, and as pure as Truth,
Ah, Moonbeam, white as is unfallen snow,
And beautiful as is the arched Rainbow,—
Ah, Daphne !

Small-handed as a baby newly born,
As fresh as is the happy summer's morn,
Clear-voicèd as the lark that soars above,
Embodiment of pure and sacred Love,—
Ah, Daphne !

These poems, these the breathing of my Soul,—
These Children of my Brain, have reached the goal
If you but read them with your bright blue eyes—
My Muse will be o'erjoyed, have gained her prize,—
Ah, Daphne !

Edinburgh, 12th February, 1914.

Britain is Awake!

SOUND the trumpet, beat the drum!
Throngs of khaki warriors come;
Belgium's burning at the stake:—
Britain is awake, awake!

Sound the pibroch, blow the fife!
Honour's dearer far than life.
Mark, O Germans, your mistake:—
Britain is awake, awake!

Look! The guns go rumbling by,
Out to know the reason why;
Rattling wagons jolt and shake:—
Britain is awake, awake!

Wave on high the Union Jack,
Send the foemen hurtling back!
Shout until Earth's bowels quake:—
BRITAIN IS AWAKE, AWAKE!

Edinburgh, 1914.

The Armed Muse

Now comes the time when I must lay aside
  The rosy rhymes of am'rous sonnets sweet,
And make my harmony a martial air,
  Breathing the melody of marching feet.

Each line must tremble with a warlike clash,
  Or cast a mellow glow of beauty rare
Upon the deeds of heroes lying dead,
  Their very heart's blood matted in their hair.

Or I must sing a very dear sad song
  About the ones at home who wait and weep,
Dreaming of those who fight in other lands,
  Or keep a weary watch upon the deep.

Then I must sometimes let my Muse run mad,
  And shout a ballad full of splendour wild,
Of those who, risking all, rush forth to shield,
  Or to avenge, the mother and her child.

God ! I must also sing in sterner strain
  Denouncing those (defend them now who can !)
Who dare to symbolize with vile disdain
  The honoured names of Soldier and of Man.

Then I must tune my Lyre for Victory,
  And make Parnassus ring with grand delight,
Greeting the splendid dawn which puts to rout
  The awful horror of a tragic night !

France, 1916.

May I have Strength

When the supremest Hour of Test is nigh,
And all the sky reflects a field of red,
When stern-faced Death extends its bony hand
And, mocking, gloats upon the glorious Dead,—
May I have strength, Great One, may I have strength.

And if it be that that dread Hand of Bone
Will seize my heart and tear it from my breast,
Then throw my corpse among the myriad slain,—
May I have strength enough to stand the Test,
May I have strength, Great One, may I have strength.

France, 1917.

Weep Not for Me

If I should die, let no one mourn my loss,
For there is nothing in this earthly dross
That warrants e'er a sigh, a moan, a tear.
I am unworthy that my distant bier
Should cause a single soul to droop with pain.
Rather be thankful that the Fates ordain
That I should sink beneath the Sea of Life
Witless of half the cares of mortal strife.
Let no one mourn because my soul was young,
For all things worth the singing I have sung.
Oh, I have tasted joys more light than air,
And grovelled deep in pits of black despair.
Life's a fair flow'r that blooms in youth's heyday,
Scented with sweetness, and of colour gay ;
But e'er the sea has clasped the blazing sun,
The beauty's faded and the fragrance done.
Therefore rejoice that my fresh stem has been
Plucked by the hand of such a peerless Queen
As Chivalry.
I have not done enough that I should make
A single eyelid quiver. For my sake
May no heart-pangs let loose the pent-up flood.
Think not of me as of a cherished bud,
But as a blossom opened to the skies—
Whose petals fall, whose perfume never dies.
Dream not of me as gone before my prime :—
There ne'er could be more noble, apt a time
Than now to die.
Know this as well : that what the Battlefield
Forbids me on Art's Altar rich to yield,

Shall still be rendered up in days to come,
When Life is gentler and the heavens less glum.
Therefore rejoice ! Let no portentous look
Presage a sadness weeping cannot brook ;
Let memories of me be brave and true :
I would not like to think the Life I gave
Had brought you woe. Be proud, not bent
With gloom, as though some frightful shame had
spent
Its fury on your house.
I die. . . . What then ?
I am but one 'mongst countless finer men.

France, 1916.

The Zenith

To-day I reach the zenith of my life,
No time more noble in my span of years
Than this, the glorious hour of splendid strife,
Of War, of cataclysmal woe, and tears.
All petty are the greatest things of yore,
All mean and sordid is my dearest lay ;
I have done nothing more worth while before . . .
My hour, my chance, my crisis, are to-day !

Albert (*en route for the Somme*), *9th October*, 1916.

The Soldier

'Tis strange to look on a man that is dead
As he lies in the shell-swept hell,
And to think that the poor black battered corpse
Once lived like you and was well.

'Tis stranger far when you come to think
That *you* may be soon like him . . .
And it's Fear that tugs at your trembling soul,
A Fear that is weird and grim !

Drop Alley Trench, The Somme, 1st October, 1916.

The Shell Hole

In the Shell Hole he lies, this German soldier of a year ago ;
But he is not as then, accoutred, well, and eager for the foe
He hoped so soon, so utterly, to crush. His muddy skull
Lies near the mangled remnants of his corpse—war's furies thus annul
The pomp and pageantry that were its own. White rigid bones
Gape through the nauseous chaos of his clothes ; the cruel stones
Hold fast the letter he was wont to clasp close to his am'rous breast.
Here, 'neath the stark, keen stars, where is no peace, no joy, nor any rest,
He lies. There, to the right, his boot, gashed by the great shell's fiendish whim,
Retains—O horrid spectacle !—the fleshless stump that was his limb !
Vile rats and mice, and flies and lice and ghastly things that carrion know
Have made a travesty of Death of him who lived a year ago.

France, 10th September, 1916.

A Wish

I WISH that I
Could know that I may die
—Yet quiver not !

Would that to me
My life less dear could be
—Too sweet I wot.

I wish that death
Could take my latest breath
—And I not care.

My job is just
To fight ; to live ; to trust
—Could I but dare.

Agney-les-Duian, 6th December, 1916.

A Subaltern's Soliloquy

Once did I ask that I be laid to rest
On some wild hillside where the grasses sway—
Ah, now, meseems, my resting-place will be
Where rifles fire, and red blood runs all day.

I cannot ask for winds to mourn my dirge
Or wailing whaups to wheel above my grave—
I shall be buried with the others there
When I have given what the others gave.

And I shall sleep beneath that foreign sod
As peacefully as e'en 'neath heather flower,
Knowing I am but one 'mongst all those men
Who breathed their latest sigh in Britain's Hour.

France, 1917.

Yellow and Gold

YONDER, behind the *parados*,
Yellow-petalled flowers grow ;
Delicately poised are they,
Making signs to me all day.
In the mellow glow of light
They will beckon to the night,
Swaying on their slender stems,
Rarer far than priceless gems.
Near them, little wisps of corn
Tremble in the breeze of morn.
Dewy-kissed and shimmering
There they hear the bullets sing ;
And the monster shells go by
With their weird and lofty sigh.
Yellow flowers and ears of grain,
Woo'd and gladden'd by the rain,
Tell me of the Fields of Home,
Fragrant lanes and rich brown loam ;
Tell me of the mountain rills,
Of the homesteads and the hills. . . .
Let us both forget the strife,
Let us dream of Love—and Life !

Written in the Trenches, 8th September, 1916.

The Nurse

YES, women wait and women weep
For those whose lot is fighting,
But women also do their bit
In manner most delighting.

Who strokes the warrior's toil-worn head
With fingers captivating?
Who brings his ev'ry need at once
And never keeps him waiting?

Who nurses him through thick and thin
And guides him past Death's portal?
Who sits up all the weary night
That he may still be mortal?

'Tis little Lady Bountiful
Who wears the Red Cross: Lord,
Grant her the things she most desires—
It is her just reward!

1916.

My Life

ONCE on a time I thought that life was dear,
A thing to cherish and to lose the which
A tragedy appalling ; but I see, through War,
My life to me should not be great or rich.

My life is but a beauteous brittle cup
Which may be dashed in fragments any day ;
I should be pleased to hold it hour by hour
And quaff its fruity sweetness while I may.

Just now 'tis mine ! To-morrow Death may come
And snatch it from my fingers ; well I know
That life lasts not for ever—if it did
'Twould be no prize :—'twould be a trial, I trow.

France, 1916.

Prayer

WHEN the time comes and all this wasty flesh
Becomes a nobler dust, a worthier clay,
When fire and all the implements of hell
Shall free my frenzied soul from earthly sway,
God grant my Passing justify my life ;
May I have rest after that hour of strife.

Arras, 13th December, 1916.

The Barriers

Say, have you ever mused upon Death
When Death was hovering near ?
Each breath you thought was your last sweet breath
And each sound the last you would hear ?

Say, have you ever mused upon Life
When Death was hovering near,
When all the Earth was athrob with strife
And the air was shaking with fear ?

Then—what were your thoughts in that hour of dread
When the skeleton passed you by ?
Pour forth your tale to the listening Dead,
Let the night winds echo your sigh.

Arras, 11th January, 1917.

A Scotsman's Reply to an Offer to Transfer to the R.W.F.

THE Royal Welsh is a regiment with record grand and true,
And they've fought like noble Britishers in France and elsewhere too ;—
But the lads who wear the kilt can teach the Welshmen what to do :—
The 42nd Highlanders (Black Watch) !

Let Welshmen keep their Regiment, and fight with pride and will ;
Let Highlanders retain their plaid and wield the claymore still ;—
So I'll keep my kilt until the Germans find that they can kill
All the 42nd Highlanders (Black Watch).

O, I'm dreaming of a mountain-side where torrents leap and roar,
And the skirling of the pipes upon a barren, rocky shore,
Where the sad-faced Scottish lassies pray for lads they'll see no more
In the 42nd Highlanders (Black Watch).

Yes, I'm longing for the heather moor, the murmur of the Tilt,
The wild and rugged places where red Highland blood's been spilt.
So, if I must die fighting, I'll die fighting in the kilt
Of the 42nd Highlanders (Black Watch).

Black Watch, 18th October, 1915, *Bedford.*

A Memory

Red roofs peeping through the stately trees,
A distant spire ; smoke floating on the breeze ;
The whir of aeroplanes high overhead ;
Brown cows, by dirty village girls led ;
A cyclist rushing down the road in front ;
And infantry, away to bear the brunt.
The shrill cry of the farmer to his mare,
A blue betrousered Frenchman over there ;
The trailing cavalcade of mounted grooms,
And distant thunder where the big gun booms.
The mottled tents and blankets out to dry,
An orderly, who carries water by,
And fleecy clouds that climb the azure sky.

Maismé Bouché, 24th September, 1916.

The Digger

He was digging, digging, digging with his little pick
and spade,
And when the Dawn was rising it was trenches that
he made ;
But when the day was over and the sun was sinking
red,—
He was digging little Homes of Rest for comrades
who were dead. . . .

1915.

The Great Dead

(Written on seeing their photographs in "The Watsonian")

Some lie in graves beside the crowded dead
In village churchyards ; others shell holes keep,
Their bodies gaping, all their splendour sped.
Peace, O my Soul. . . . A Mother's part to weep.

Say : do they watch with keen all-seeing eyes
My own endeavours in the whirling hell ?
Ah, God ! how great, how grand the sacrifice.
Ah, God ! the manhood of yon men who fell !

And this is War. . . . Blood and a woman's tears,
Brave memories adown the quaking years.

Arras, 6th April, 1917.

Summer is Dead

SUMMER is dead,
For the last rose has fallen ;
Summer is dead,
For the swallows have flown ;
Summer is dead,
For the wheat sheaves are all in ;
Summer is dead,
The last zephyr has blown.
Summer is dead ! Summer is dead !

The reddening leaves are dying with sorrow ;
The sky is all cloudy and dark overhead ;
The birds know that they may die—frozen to-morrow,—
Summer is dead ! Summer is dead !

Summer is dead,
For the last rose has fallen ;
Summer is dead,
And is gone for a year ;
Summer is dead,
For the harvest is all in :
Summer is dead,
Russet Autumn is here !
Summer is dead ! Summer is dead !
And no lark overhead
Sings songs any more
At heaven's bright door !
Summer is dead ! Ah ! Summer is dead !

Edinburgh, 31st December, 1913.

A Grave on the Hillside

Oh, raise no rude tombstone to point out my rest ;
Gentle comrades, that tombstone would weigh on
my breast.
The pure air of mountainous places will be
Enough of a tombstone, and pleasing to me.
And the clouds of the heavens shall flit o'er the blue,
Making pictures that change and are ever anew ;
And the country smoke rising from crofts far below
Shall carpet my rest-place and heavenwards go,
And the bleat of the sheep from the wilds of the
moor
Shall wail me a dirge ; and the streamlet so pure
Shall sing me a love song, a melody sweet.
Then perhaps some poor wanderer—weary of feet—
Shall climb past my rest-place, but never shall know
That I am beneath him !—'tis far better so.

1913.

The Goblet

THEY gave a golden Cup to me
And told me it was mine :
Inside this goblet richly gemmed
I found a ruddy wine.

They told me 'twas the Wine of Life,
That I must drink the draught ;
And at the sip that first I took
I smiled and crooned and laughed.

This was a wondrous wine, thought I—
Intoxicating bliss . . .
I drank and dreamed of deeds to do,
And maidens fair to kiss.

But now—the Cup is dull and black,
The Wine no longer sweet . . .
I long to crash the Goblet down
In atoms at my feet.

It cannot be, and I must strain
The black brim to my lips . . .
And thus the draught must be consumed
In soul-degrading sips.

They gave a golden Cup to me,
And told me it was mine,
But in this Goblet richly gemmed
I found a poisoned Wine.

Edinburgh, 1913.

Music

Some people love to soar above in a deep religious gloom,
When a pealing organ echoes forth like a chant in a stilly tomb.
The sacred tone and the great Alone seem like the Voice of Doom.

A maiden fair with rich brown hair thrills out a touching song,
And tears of sorrow drench the eyes of him the world calls strong,
A trembling note from a throbbing throat tells him his life is wrong.

O, Music's breath as sweet as death, and soothing as the grave,
Can melt the heart in tyrant's breast, and damp the eyes of knave ;
Its lure can make a maiden pure, and make a coward brave.

But Music's touch can make me clutch my chair with eyes like hell,
And raise within this Soul of mine thoughts I can never tell—
The gnawing care of dull despair, and a thousand doubts as well.

It makes me know with sudden blow Remorse's whipcord keen,
And brings me back to things I've done, and fearful things I've seen,
And like a toll my aching Soul rings out the " might have been."

I wish to God the verdant sod hid me beneath its fold,
And that my thrilling heart had stopped and was for ever cold ;
And pray that this may be the day when my last prayer is told.

The sad sweet pain comes back again of pleasures I have known ;
I hear once more the Voice of Friend in Music's raptured tone ;
And then pray I that should he die he may not die alone.

1914.

A Fuller Song

Be still, my heart, for Time dulls every pain,
  Be still, my soul, oh, suffer and be strong,
And afterwards we'll sing a richer strain,
    A fuller song.

Songs are my Life, my Life's a song always :
  Into my verse I pour my very soul ;
When I am gay or sad my muse obeys
    With chime or toll.

Therefore, be strong, and some day Time will heal
  Your sorrow, and a sweet content bestow ;
Therefore, be strong, and suffer what you feel,
    Poor heart of woe.

O, numbing grief, that hangs upon me still ;
  O, what a price to forfeit and be strong ;
O, dull remorse ; O, sorrow's grating thrill ;
    O, fuller song.

Edinburgh, 1915.

The Poet

THEY do not know my deep, poetic soul,
That sometimes heaves tempestuous and fierce ;
They cannot tell the agony or doubt
That often comes my very heart to pierce.

They have not learned that I am like a reed
That's played upon by every wave of thought ;
They do not dream that in Remorse's clutch
This merry-looking soul is often caught.

'Tis better so : I would not have them sad,
Not have their eyes grow dim with startled look,
Gazing bewildered at the blotty sheets
That constitute my Uncompleted Book.

30*th June*, 1915.

Rupert Brooke

My God ! that Art, the sacred goddess Art,
Should see her aptest pupil thus depart !
O, Powers of Heav'n, who fed his great rich Soul,
Faint-breathing winds, that sang his fun'ral toll,
Fields, hedges, streams, O, friends and lovers too,—
Weep—yet rejoice—for him whose life you rue !
His balmy sweetness answered Honour's Laws,
His life was given in the glorious Cause—
To save weak women from a monster's jaws,
To shield the suckling infant from its claws !
Bards ! Don your mail ! Sound forth the grand
fanfare ;
Snatch up your swords ! Be arméd, and prepare
T'avenge his death, invade the Dragon's lair !
Lay low hell's fiends ! Remember *he* lies there,
His god-like manhood crumbling into clay,
His blushing fragrance fading fast away. . . .
God ! O, be armed, and strike to-day, to-day !
Stand not a-wailing where sad willows sway.
Think of him, his life-blood given ;
Know the way his soul has striven ;
He lies dead beneath great heaven,
To his death by Duty driven.

Lament not that he sacrificed not all
Upon Art's altar ere he heard the Call,
The Call which every man and woman too
Must answer : give sweet life to Death—his due.
Rush forth to Death—if so your fate decree,
Give up your manhood to Queen Chivalry.

O, glorious Death ! O, Lethé, dulcet stream !
O, Death Stars, with your soft translucent gleam !
O, stilly Grave, where pains harass no more !
O, sweet last Breath, that lets the Spirit soar !
Welcome, King Death ! O, Panoply of red !
Death, that hast crowned the ever-living Dead !—
Here, strike me down, release my throbbing Soul
In fields of carnage where dread thunders roll !
O, Powers eternal, heralded by blood !
Dear Minstrelsy, the Band misunderstood !
Hark ! How ferocious is my threnody. . . .
Moan, troubled Muse, you must not shout to-day !
Moan, weep, despair . . . His Lyre is broke in two . . .
Yet listen—rising splendid, ever new,
A sad dear song is wafted on the air . . .
His Soul is singing : it's not buried there !

President Wilson to the Kaiser

(After—a long way after—Matthew Arnold's Sonnet to Shakespeare)

OTHERS abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask : thou winkest and art still,
Out-topping rudeness. Wilt thou fight until
Thine own dup'd slaves uncrown thy Majesty ?
Sowing thy submarines upon the sea,
Giving thy crosses for the crimes most base,
Thou mak'st unworthy all thy kultur'd race
To bear the searchlights of morality.
And thou, professing heav'nly hosts to know,
Self-proud, self-prais'd, self-honour'd, self-secure,
Didst walk the earth uncurs'd ! No longer so !
All pains the mortal body must endure,
All weakness that impairs, all griefs that bow,
Must find their home in thee, rash Kaiser, now !

To the Kaiser
This Thou Hast Done!

You violate the rich red blood of pregnant motherhood,
Or hunt the weary maid who flies as from a beast of prey ;
You put to ling'ring death the agéd ones whose snow-white hair
Becomes congealed with honoured blood by hate and passion spilt ;
Frail little children writhe beneath your heels and scream with dread,
Their tiny hands upheld in mute appeal which would assuage
The fierce tempestuous lust of famish'd wolves
And, lo ! You think approval comes from God, from Him you mock
With cunning oaths, and fiendish bloody deeds. . . . O, Hypocrite,
Beware ! The Day of Reckoning draws nigh, when you must face
The horrors you have done—red-handed murder ! vile disgrace !

Edinburgh, 1916.

The Kaiser on Going to the Wars

(With profound apologies to the shade of Colonel Richard Lovelace)

TELL me not, Friends, I am unkind
  That, with reluctant sigh,
From holy thoughts of pious mind
  To war and arms I fly.

True, I must wield the mailéd fist
  In rapine unconcealed ;
And with a hymn of hate enlist
  Vile gas, my skin to shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
  As good Huns should adore ;
I could not love mein Gott so much
  Loved I not bloodshed more !

1915.

A Baby's Bath Song

(Inscribed to Doreen Margaret)

SAILING away to the Land of Beds,
Where tired little Babies lay soft curly heads :—
Away on the hot and soapy foam,
In the great white shining Bath at Home,—
Away ! Away !

On, past the place where the sponges grow,
And Loofas go wandering to and fro,—
In the distance the lights of Bedland gleam—
The Country where Babies go each night to dream,—
Away ! Away !

And then, in a towel, the Babe comes ashore,
When Mummy tells stories of weird faery lore.
The lights flicker out in the hushed Land of Sleep,
And out from the darkness the Dream Goblins creep,—
Good night ! Good night !
Sweet, Babe, Good night !

Wolverhampton, 5th April, 1913.

Ocean

O THE merry voice of Ocean,
When the summer sands are gold ;
O the merry voice of Ocean,
When Lovers' tales are told ;
And the gleaming wavelets glitter,
Roll, and leap, and dance, and start ;
Where there is no time that's fitter
For the swain to tell his heart ;—
O the merry voice of Ocean,
O the Lovers' question old,
O the endless heaving motion,
When the summer sands are gold.

O the cruel roar of Ocean,
When the sea birds wail and cry ;
O the jealous, greedy Ocean,
When the sailors sink and die !
When the Lover's heart is broken,
And the Widow's tears are shed,
When the anguished words are spoken
For the sailors, cold and dead.
O the booming knell of Ocean,
O the broken maiden's sigh ;
O the endless depths of Ocean,
Where the sailors sink, and die !

Broughty Ferry, 21st February, 1914.

An Inn

GIVE me an Inn, a little country Inn,
Where rosy Landlord smokes, and fills the cup ;
Where ruddy wenches, dimpled cheek to chin,
Give weary countrymen their homely sup.

Give me the cosy dimness of the lamp,
The healthy talk of ploughmen back from toil ;
Give me my Friend to come with me and tramp,
Far from the busy city's rude turmoil.

Give me a simple chamber, wooden bed,
With linen snowy-white, and windows wide,
Through which there blow, upon the weary head,
The odour-bearing zephyrs from outside.

And when I die, let me be laid to rest
Upon a hill where sweet winds move the grass,—
And as a roof (for this kind is the best),
The fleecy clouds that over heaven pass.

Nor let a stone maintain my memory—
A worthless boulder on the hillside set ;
By what I've done let men remember me,
And after that—well, let the world forget.

Edinburgh, 22nd March, 1914.

Friendship

THERE are few things more beautiful than Friendship good and true ;
There are few names more beautiful than "Friend,"
In Friendship there are mingled Love, Respect, and Pleasure too,—
In it the laws of true Religion blend.

I have my Friend :—I can defy the Earth !
Hence, dull and carking Care, and foolish Love !
There is no joy in this wide world that's worth
The gift of Friendship, sent us from Above.

Edinburgh, January, 1914.

Bicycling

THE open road before me, with moor on either side,
The open heavens o'er me, to watch me on my ride :—
A mountain in the distance, on which the heather grows,
A hamlet in the hollow, past which a streamlet flows :—
Under the sky
Machine and I
Glide on and on, nor ever care to know
Of time that's slipping past, nor where we go.
The Breath of Nature on us, no evil we forbode . . .
O Glories of Creation ! Yo-ho ! for the Open Road !

Edinburgh, 24th January, 1914.

Life—Death

THE more I work, the more I play,
The more I laugh, the more I pray,
The more I bless each new-born day,
The less can Death then snatch away.

Grief

In the dead of night
When stars shone bright
  I lay on my couch alone ;
And the swooping owl
With its piercing howl
  Flew past and heard me moan ;
And the rustling breeze
Left the poplar trees
  And came to my casement wide ;
It heard me cry to the purple sky
  As it circled and eddied and sighed.
And the moon was there
With its glassy stare,
  And it stopped in its nightly race,
For it saw the gloom
In my weary room,
  And it saw the white of my face.
Then the God of Love
Who dwells Above
  Bent down and saw I wept . . .
And He kissed my head as He softly said :
  " Peace, sad Heart ! "—And I slept.

Edinburgh, 1915.

Despondency in Town

THE City's voice does not rejoice, but wails in endless pain,
For city life is always strife and striving after gain;
And city death knows not the breath that comes from new-mown grain.

The toiler toils in low wage coils and suffers grief unguessed,
A shiv'ring child with manners wild in filthy rags is dressed,
And winds that howl like a hungry owl tell her that death is best.

And women too who never knew what womanhood should mean,
Prowl up and down the glaring town, and hate their life, I ween,
And shrink with shame when they rename the things that might have been.

Foul reeking men from the drinking den pursue their stagg'ring way,
And in their dreams a vision seems to call: "Thou shalt repay!"
And women meek with blanching cheek kneel down and try to pray.

Then over all a smoky pall shuts out the blessed
sky,
The sun o'erhead sinks flaming red, and hears the
City sigh,
And sees below an endless woe, and eyes that cannot
dry.

O, distant far, where free hills are, and stately fir
trees wave,
Where sings a stream and dewdrops gleam stands
He Who came to save,
And says aloud to a passing cloud : " This was the
Life I gave ! "

Edinburgh, 1914

How Poor are They

How poor are they whose souls cannot aspire
To love the sea, the setting sun afire ;
The sanctity that crowns the maiden mild,
The mystery that wraps the little child.
He must be poor (in money ne'er so rich)
Who cannot stop near-by a wayside ditch
To watch the wondrous glory of a flower,
A humble weed, creation of an hour ;
Who cannot gaze enraptured at the sky
Or pause a moment when the zephyrs sigh ;
And deaf is he whose soul can never find
The voice of someone whispering in the wind.
How hopeless he whose soul has never heard
The voice of greatness in the wailing bird ;
How wretched he whose soul can never blend
The names of God and Love with that of friend.

1914.

Prospect

YET shall I see the pale Moon pick her way
Among the tow'ring mountains of my home,
And watch the little wisps of frightened cloud
Over the grayling face of heaven roam.

Yet shall I hear the weirdly wailing whaup
Cry to the moor : the murky peaty pool
Will yet delight me with its stilly charm ;
Sweet winds of night will make my forehead cool.

The squeaking mouse will startle at my tread ;
The owl will hoot from its secluded rest,
And bats will fumble by me in the dusk ;
The sun will gild the hay-ricks in the West.

The poppies in the yellow corn will thrill
My soul ; the buttercups and daisies too
Will yet besprinkle all the grassy land :—
I shall see all the lovely things I knew.

The chaffinch and the linnet in the hedge
Will chirp to me ; the dipper and the wren
Will pirouette beside the solemn stream ;
The reedy marsh will show the water-hen.

Then when with fragrant wand'ring I am drowsy,
When all the bees have flitted to the comb,
I'll turn my steps to where Content is waiting,
And rest me by the gen'rous fires of Home.

France, 21st September, 1916.

This is What *I* Ask

THIS is what *I* ask : the sky above ;
The wind's caress ;
The joys of Friends ; or, when I need it,
Loneliness.

This is what *I* seek : the mystic moon,
Its ghostly light ;
The rumbling roar of the angry ocean
In the night.

This is what *I* wish : the buttercup ;
The yellow grain ;
The wilds of the moor and the mountains great ;
And the rain.

This is what *I* love : the forest gloom ;
The meadow fair ;
The dear, dear look in your eyes ;
And your hair.

1913.

Depression and Impression

WEARY and worn and sore oppressed,
Weary and worn, in search of rest,
What is the use of Life unblessed ?
What is the aim of this hopeless quest ?
Why must we laugh ?
Why must we sigh ?
Why must we live ?
Why must we die ?
What is the end of this mortal Test ?

1913.

To the Memory of a Friend

Do you remember when we sat and talked
Upon the springy lawn of Poesie ? Or walked
Far from the City's smoke among the moors
Where purple heather beckons and allures,
And where the whaup wheels in its shrieking flight,
Or startled grouse rise in their flurried fright ?
Do you remember how the mountain stream
Tore down the rugged steeps to thrill and gleam
Translucent in the midday sun's embrace ?
The sheep-paths, too, that used to wind and trace
Their aimless way beyond the highest crest,
Leading—in fancy—to some Land of Rest,
Were friendly sights. And sometimes we would prowl
Among the lighted streets where night sprites howl
And lull the city with a hard, fierce croon
Beneath the shadowed myst'ry of the moon.

. . . . . .

We did not think the day would e'er dawn red
When you would join the cohort of the Dead,
The Dead who stare with great unseeing eyes
Up to the cruel greyness of the skies. . . .
We did not dream your threnody would be
The ceaseless tirade of Artillery ;
We did not know the breeze would whinny o'er
Your shapeless body in its clammy gore. . . .
No, Friend, we did not know in days gone by
The listening stars alone would hear your cry. . . .

Rest, then ! Some grave that bears no mark or
name
Shields for all time your mangled, tortured frame.
Friend, it is ended. . . . All the things we guessed
You know. . . . What matters then the rest ?

1913.

The Dream

I DREAMT a dream celestial in my billet bed last
night
(Where the pillow's soft and dreamy and the sheets
are snowy white) :
For I dreamt that I was happy and my heart was
brave and true,
And I dreamt that I was thinking—in the trenches,
dear—of you !

France, 1916.

The Prompter

I STOOD beside the Prompter's chair,
A charming maiden she ;
And while she prompted those who played,
Dan Cupid prompted me.

The footlights glared three feet away,
The toplights shone above ;
And while she read the Book of Words,
I scanned the Book of Love !

"Very Light" Verse

The Medicine Man

WHO is it calms my frenzied brain ?
Who is it soothes my ev'ry pain ?
(Then quickly sends me "up" again !—)
The Doctor !

Who is it gives us pills galore ?
(The same for ailments many a score !)
Then for parade shows us the door ?—
The Doctor !

Yet who—when *strafing's* to be done—
With wild contempt defies the Hun ?
Yes, who for *sang-froid* takes the bun ?—
The Doctor !

4th November, 1916.

Richmond Camp

YEST'RE'EN I met a man who said to me :
" I see you men are with the F.O.C.
I also have three brothers of renown :
Two are alive, and one in Richmond Town ! "

For when Lord God in anger shut the gates
Of Eden (some say in the United States)
And formed a Hell, He said with scornful frown :
" Here is my Hell ! "—and looked at Richmond Town.

But when the ways of men became obsessed
With vicious deeds and acts and thoughts unblest,
The Lord created, with a wrathful stamp,
A super-hell, and called it Richmond Camp.

Now clergymen of great and sterling worth
Declare each man has got his hell-on-earth,
Where devils dance and prod with red-hot forks . . .
And you will find this Hell in Richmond, Yorks !

7th May, 1916.

Rouse Parade

'Tis morn ! As yet no lazy sun
Has risen in the East,
Yet I (poor sub !) must up and shave
At once—or soon, at least !

For ere my little wristlet watch,
Beside my pillow laid,
Has ticked from six to half-past six—
I'll be on Rouse Parade !

It seems so very fine in bed,
So soft and warm, that I
With loathing throw the blankets off
And dress with many a sigh.

O Power that watchest soldiers' needs,
I pray, as oft I've prayed,
That thou shouldst with a pitying hand
Wash out the Rouse Parade !

1915.

To Robert Burns

(An Apology)

(Published in "The Edinburgh Evening Dispatch")

Ah, Burns, thou rantin', chantin' bardie,
Mon, I ha'e been a wee fule-hardie,—
For praise to gi'e thee I've been tardie,
Poetic chiel' ;
Afore thy altar—noo I've heard thee—
I humbly kneel.

Below thy ain poetic feet
(For high Parnassus is thy seat)
I sit an' sing, an' aft near greet
Wi' dull Remorse ;
An' drink Care's Cup o' Wine fu' neat ;—
An' thou'rt its Source.

For I ha'e daured (O rash, rash mortal !)
The praises o' thy rhymes to throttle ;—
An' said thou'rt too fond o' the Bottle :—
(O Fule, self-centred !)
Noo I'd be proud to pass the portal
Whaur' thou hast entered !

Edinburgh, 11th January, 1914.

To the Devil

(After Burns, of immortal memory)

O DEVIL, muckle glow'rin beastie,
If ye're tae mak a blindy feastie
(An', mon, ma flesh 'll be richt tastie !)
O' ma auld shell,
Ane thing I ask,—the answer heest ye,
Ye Imp o' Hell.

I am a cyclist—p'rhaps ye know it,—
As weel as an inspirèd poet.
(Don't mock me here, or ye maun' rue it,
Ma bonnie de'il.)
Now here's ma plea, ye ugly hoolet,
Ye red-hot chiel !

When I am lyin' dead an' stiff,
An' ye come in ma corpse tae lif'—
An' ye may be a wee bit squiff'
In drunken fit,—
Let me FREEWHEEL for ane last whiff
Doon tae the pit !

1913.

Sometimes

Sometimes I'd rid me of this khaki yoke,
And wander far afield and o'er the hills,
List'ning enraptured to the skylark's song,
Gazing enchanted at the leaping rills.

Sometimes I long to leave the dusty square
And seek the buttercup and daisy fair,
Dreaming beneath some hoary rev'rend oak,
Breathing the myst'ry of the fragrant air.

Sometimes I would forget the deep red blood
That sprinkles all ; the wonder of the Land,
And watch the rolling billows of the Sea,
Sitting contented on its golden sand.

These thoughts are sweet, but sweeter, sweeter far
The noble pledging of our Country's word. . . .
Therefore the Poet now must arm his Muse,
And, with a shout of pride, take up the Sword !

26th March. 1916.

Shakespeare

Is this a god ? Can this a mortal be
Who has a pow'r o'er words exceeding far
The sway of kings o'er subjects ? Is't possible
That such a one was born of flesh and blood ?
Meseems a wit like this would rest more meet
Upon a throne celestial, high above
The petty cares and vices that harass
The souls of men.
Who is this Shakespeare, penning lines that make
Our mightiest genius like an infant muse ?
England, be proud ! Blow, trumpets ; bugles, sound !
Shakespeare was born here : this is sacred ground !

1914.

Before

At least say this : my mem'ry will be dear
With that sad sweetness which is nobly fine.
I ask no more : the rest cannot be changed ;
Let memory and tenderness be mine.
And may I die more nobly than I live
(For I have lived in folly and regret) :
Then in the last Great Moment when I pass,
I shall have paid my Life's outstanding Debt !

Drop Alley, The Somme, France, October, 1916.

Requiem

(After R. L. S.)

UNDER the free and open sky,
There let me rest, nor breathe a sigh,—
Gladly I've lived, and gladly I'll lie,
Content by night and day.

Grave no rude tombstone to mark my rest ;
But deep in your soul may you say with zest :
" Here is the Seeker after his Quest,
And the Actor after the Play."

Edinburgh, 29th March, 1914.

To Promotion

(By a Second Lieutenant)

I AM waiting for you yet, Second Star,
And I haven't got a notion where you are ;
  But I'm longing for the time
  When your life will be sublime
With your brother on my cuff, Second Star.

For when you come to me, ev'ry day
I shall get a silver shekel—extra pay ;
  So my tailor will be glad
  (After all the shocks he's had !)
When that small elusive Star comes my way !

Prose Poems

(After Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian Mystic)

WHEN my heart is bowed down and my Soul is heavy within me, lo, I sing a sad song that relief may be brought to my Pain. When my very Being is in the wild ecstasy of gladness, behold, my song is one of mirth, so that my soul dances with the motion of my body. How can I thank Thee for the gift of my Lyre, O my Lord? Were it to be taken from me I should be stricken with sadness, and my eyes would be blind to the greatest beauties of Life—those subtle glories which only the poetic mind can interpret. What can I do better than award Thee a thank-offering of songs in Thy praise, even though my worldly voice is not fit for such a holy purpose? Come, flood my throat with Song, that I may be filled with a great joy and a great pride.

How much sweeter, O my Lover, is the Lark's song of praise than the empty chant of worldly priests and gaudily-dressed men and women. As he rises from his nest upon the heath and ascends the sunny heavens, see how his throat swells as though to burst with the fulness of his song. No mortal man is so devout—not even the holy hermit counting his rosary in the wild fastnesses of some hilly glen. The weird call of the musing owl is more after Thy heart than the ribald babel of a thoughtless crowd, chanting meaningless words to Thee. And behold, they marvel and are downcast that Thou hearest them not. . . . O Fools, standing in the fashionable Temple, think not that the Lord will hear your wretched chants, for they are but an empty hypocrisy and an insult to the greatness of His Divinity.

O LOVER of my Soul, all is dark and still. . . . I sit and gaze long and long into the fire. . . . It is frosty outside. . . . A frozen bird falls dead. . . . An owl shrieks. . . . The fire sinks with a sudden crash. . . . The church tower rings out solemnly the hour of twelve ; and each stroke goes through me like a sword-thrust. It is at this time that the miser awakens from his dream of avarice, and flees sickened from his gold. It is now that the murderer repents his crime, gnashing his teeth in an agony of mind. And so I, gazing into the dying embers, decide that even thus my sins must die, and that the strokes being thrown out into the night must be a death-knell for them, and at the same time a note of celebration for the birth of the new day with its new hopes and aspirations. . . . O my Lord, help me to realise these hopes and aspirations : let them be not merely a poet's dreams. The chimes have ceased, but their message is still within my heart.

I AM the Poet of the two great affections—FRIENDSHIP and LOVE. I sing of human passions, and all the elements that go to make up Life. My song does not proclaim the peace of Nature, because Nature is not peaceful, but always struggling, writhing, fighting, screaming, wailing. Like the human mind, it is usually in torment, but has its spells of peace. My chant is of the agonies of remorse and of great longings and desires relieved by the soothing and inspiring influences of Love and Friendship. My song now shrieks from the bottomest pit of Mental Pain, and now floats melodiously from the peaceful pinnacles of Love and Friendship. I pour my very Soul into my music. . . . O Lover of my Soul, accept my song-offerings issuing from the Lyre Thou gavest me. . . . Hark! I sing about Thy Creations. . . . Surely Thou wilt turn Thine ear and make me glad, my Lord?

THE Mansion of my Life has many gloomy passages and many dusty rooms. It is so large that I have never reached the extremes of it ; all I can see is a light shining far, far in the distance, only a light that is less bright than it should be, so that I often stumble in the darkness. Often and often I am dragged into the filthy rooms by a weird fascination, and I am overcome with joy as cobwebs and heaps of dirt cling to my face and hair. When I go out again into the great sun-swept apartments I revile myself for my foolishness. The doors of these dusty chambers are always left open so that Thou mayest enter and make them clean ; but, lo, when I see Thee approaching the filthy thresholds, I tremble with dread, lest Thou shouldest enter and make them beautiful.

I SEEK Thee not in the glaring chapel, where strutting women, decked in sparkling gems and rich brocades, flaunt all their tawdry splendour in their neighbours' eyes. Nor in the empty talk of worldly preachers do I seek illuminating stars to light the mystery-laden paths of Thine Own great Philosophy. No ; I seek Thy radiant Face where the smiling sun kisses the yellow daisy, where the sky anoints the closing buttercup with dew ; and in the lonely murmur of a stream, or in the loud weird shriek of a sea-bird do I listen to the teaching of Thy Word.

Edinburgh, 1913—1915.

BEHOLD, my life was without light, even as a dark and slimy cellar wherein burns no lantern. I groped about in this loathsome prison like a rat in a deathless trap, when, lo, a light suddenly burst in heavenly glory over the darkness. I looked up, full of content and wonder, and saw that the Light was called Friend !

O Lover of my Soul, I would give Thee a heart's praise were Friendship even the only gift Thou hadst lavished upon me, for it has made my aimless song one of purity and truth. Thou hast given me in the fulness of Thy bounty many priceless things, but the greatest of them all are Friendship and Love.

When I and my Beloved are made as One, the holy ceremony will not be fulfilled in any spacious Temple by a worldly priest, nor will a staring host of men and women, clad in costly robes, watch with their eager eyes the tying of the knot which will not be untied until the great wings of Death, with sudden movement, smash the Vessel of our Life to atoms. Nor will a greedy crowd of people, sumptuously attired, eat from the festive board, making our holy wedlock foul excuse for hideous revelry. . . . Far in some hamlet nestling 'mid the hills, where lonely streams proclaim the joy of life, where croodling owls bewail the ways of men, and where the trees commune in everlasting Peace—there, in a humble dwelling-place of God, will some sweet old and hoary man, the saintly priest of Him Who dwells above, bind her to me in dim religious light. The swallows in the roof will cease their work in awe, holding their silent breath lest they

should break the stillness of the Peace serene. No bells will peal, except within our hearts, and up in the old belfry some musing owl will echo forth a muffled note of praise. Then she and I will walk forth arm-in-arm; and as we leave the lowly dwelling-place of God, sweet, flow'ry-scented zephyrs will breathe gently in our faces, telling of the freshness of the grass and the mighty mystery of Him. The daisies in the meads will open up their little hearts to us, the primroses will smile upon us as we tread the lawn, and the distant bleat of a mountain goat, or the shrill shriek of a hawk will bless our future life. And—behold, we shall be happy, and full of a lasting content.

1915.

Prose Idyll

A BUTTERFLY, newly escaped from the confines of its chrysalis, flew on to a dandelion—a common wayside weed. It thought the dandelion the fairest flower on God's earth — until it alighted on a poppy, which flowered close by. This, it thought, must be the Creator's most perfect accomplishment. And so, each bloom it saw was to it the fairest, until it flew to a delicate rosebud, when it knew instinctively that this eclipsed all the others in sheer pure beauty. Than this rosebud it never saw a more sweetly fragrant or more wonderfully-formed flower.

My Love was like the butterfly flitting rapturously from bloom to bloom. *Now* I have reached the Rosebud, and my soul is filled with inexpressible content and ecstasy.

Edinburgh, 1914.

A Child

In the eyes of a little child there is the unblemished philosophy of a thousand years, a philosophy which is unable to give expression to itself, and which is helpless save to make a mute appeal for comprehension and sympathy.

In the eyes of a weeping child there is the accumulated pain and despair of a thousand generations telling of unspeakable glories and unfulfilled desires. In the eyes of a weeping child there is a love horrible to behold. The very sea is shallow in comparison with the awful depths in the eyes of a child. Oh! let me bear the curse of a million men rather than the look of mistrust and reproach from the eyes of a child.

Edinburgh, 1915.

To Virgil

O Virgil, if the truth at last be told,
I cannot love the musings of thy pen.
Thy verse its gold to me does ne'er unfold,
The glory of thy work's beyond my ken !

The language that thou wrot'st in now is dead,
Thy metaphors are long since past their youth.
No, no, Virgilius, no ! as I have said,
I love thee not—and that's the solemn truth !

To Omar Khayyám

O Omar Khayyám, foul drunkard of the East,
O who art thou that darest to praise the glutton at
the feast ?

The flowing bowl in horrid gladness you
Proclaim to all the world's a virtue true.

Full many men, the best of men indeed,
Have sins, yet do not preach the life they lead.

You ask—nay, even urge—men to forsake
Good honest lives ; forbidden fruit to take.

But you, the wallowing drunkard of the East,
Persuade the holiest man to be a beast.

Why do you, Omar Khayyám, with your cup,
Urge to descend, men who have struggled up ?

O can there be, e'en from the drinking den,
One, having sinned, who'd not be white again ?

'Twould seem that thou, O wine-besotted one,
Carest not for all the evil thou hast done !

Yet thou art not like him who, having drunk,
Cannot climb up the pit where he has sunk ;

For you exult in all that you have done ;
Do you repent a sin ? You answer, " None ! "

And so, Omar Khayyám, you drink with relish rare
The flowing wine that's leading you to God alone
knows where !

To Err is Human

When my good friend commits a fault
My inmost soul doth oft exalt,
For then I see
That even he
Can do a wrong,
And that though strong
He is a mortal after all,
And must at times trip up and fall,
So more befits the company
Of weakly sinner such as I.

1913.

A Song

SING me a Song of the Army,
Of khaki and rifles and drums,
Sing me a ballad of heroes,
Taking each day as it comes.
Sing of the Colonel who bellows,
Sing of the Major who swears,
Sing of the slackers who don't care a jot,
And the Second Lieutenant who cares.
Sing of the raptures of marching
(I *may* interrupt, but don't grieve !) ;
But above all come tell me, come tell me
The glorious myth about leave !

1915.

The Universality of Pain

You say that the flowers are glad
And know no pain ?
Do you think they are left unhurt
By the wind and rain ?

You say that the lark sings for joy
Up overhead ?
Don't you see a hawk swooping down
With talons of red ?

You say that the wind knows no care
As it wheels in its flight ?
Then why does it sob so and moan
On the bleak moor at night ?

You say that a babe is not bound
By care-worn ties ?
Just look at the tears that o'erflow
From its bonny blue eyes.

Every Soul on the earth has its pain,
Every creature its woe :
I thank God from the depths of my heart
That it is so.

Edinburgh, 1913.

Envoi

Be calm. I follow where my friends have gone.
Have nought of fear.
I go to herald in the Glorious Dawn
Which breaks not here.

Be brave. A myriad mothers' sons before
Have trod this path. . . .
Think of my comrades, stifled in their gore—
War's aftermath.

Be proud. Thank God I go o'erwhelmed with pride :
My hackled bonnet
Bids *me* be proud. Pray on the Other Side
No stain be on it.

Be calm ! Be brave ! Be proud ! No conscript base
Is this thy son. . . .
I go light-hearted, tired of peaceful days,
To strafe the Hun !

Edinburgh, 9th August, 1916.

My Friend

THERE oft come times when I would fain be dead,
Lying on the mountain-side, with heather o'er my
head,
(For when I die, the hill will be my bed);
I pray that God to me will send
That restful, everlasting, deep repose,
Known but by him alone o'er whom the damp day
blows,
And then I think—as God in heaven knows,—
I think of thee, my Friend.

I could not bear to be so far apart
From one who holds a comrade's place so near my
heart,
So from my musing reverie I start,—
Forget my longing for the End.
If I could know *my* life gave that content
To thee, which *thy* companionship to me has lent,
I would rejoice that God had ever sent
Me here to be thy Friend.

Edinburgh, 1914.

Khaki Philosophy

I saw the khaki soldiers marching by,
Their rifles resting on their shoulders broad ;
These are the men who drill, and fight, and die—
Giving their limbs and souls to Mighty God.

These are the men who know that, soon or late,
They will face Death, defying what is wrong,
Not like doomed men they go to meet their fate,
For they defy the power of Death with Song.

Hence, then, the sophistry of hoary sage,
Youth has discovered what is priceless rare ;
Life is a very noble heritage
When it is given, other lives to spare !

Life is a thing that we should ready be
To render up at any time to Him,
And He may " call in " on the angry sea
Or on the field of battle, mad and grim.

So when the time comes and we must obey,
When our souls with death must go along,
Let us meet fate with gladness on that day
Like our brave khaki soldier-lads—with Song.

France, 1916.

To-day

A RIFLE fired . . . a groaning man sank down to
die . . .
An anguished prayer to his white lips leapt . . .
Far on a highland hill where browsing cattle lie
A waiting woman wept.

Which ?

A Sonnet

If we could have a choice of lives to lead—
  One full of holiness, sacred, retired,
  Perhaps as monk in dreary robes attired,
Fing'ring the rosary's religious bead—
A Man of God, bowed down with worldly need ;—
  The other life, one by the world admired,
  Rich, but perhaps by sinful actions mired,
A life of lust, a life, maybe, of greed :—
Which would we choose ?—The holy man of God,
  Praying devoutly in the chapel dim,
  Giving all life, all heart, all soul to Him ?—
Or would we be the prosp'rous man of fraud,
  Finding in petty evils worldly bliss ?—
  O, ask me not !—I dare not answer this !

Wolverhampton, 1913.

The Bombers

THE Bombers make merry with primers and fuses,
But when they get busy I am full of excuses
To go—for I find in bombs nought that amuses—
But rather the other extreme.

The bomb No. 5 with its iron serration
Arouses in me not the least fascination ;
In fact I run fast when they start detonation ;
And you can't see my feet then for dust.

But still they go playing about with delight
In the midst of gun-cotton, gunpowder, lyddite,
Or throwing live bombs in the peace of the night
And disturbing the sleep of the camp.

On account of their hobbies the Bombers we dub
The Boys who belong to " The Suicide Club " !

France, 1916.

A Little Bit o' Fluff

SHE's a little bit o' fluff, m' boy, a little bit o' fluff ;
She's the pick o' God's fair womenkind, a tasty bit o' stuff ;
'Er 'air is like the mornin' and 'er eyes are like the sea ;
'Er cheeks are like rose petals, an'—she's goin' t' marry me !

I ain't a bloomin' poet, an' I can't express myself,
But the other girls when seen with 'er are shoved right on the shelf ;
She's just a bit o' all right, lad, a fluffy bit o' stuff.
You say I'm lookin' 'appy ? Bless m' soul, ain't that enough ?

Edinburgh, 1913.

A Thought

DARE I regret to join the Splendid Dead
Who gave the fragrant blossom of their Youth
At Duty's call ?
My very all
Is not enough.
Sing, O sad heart, the red blood opes the way ;
Honour is found in all this bloody fray.
Although I die . . . yet have I won the day !

Emblem of War, of rapine and distress,
Great forests stripped of all their leafiness . . .
Pointing above and solemn as a nun,
Or like a copse when sets the crimson sun.
When all is o'er and fired the final shot,
The mem'ry of these times will leave me not.

Drop Alley, The Somme, France, October, 1916.

Souls that Pass in the Night

SELDOM a day goes by, meseems, without
A name by me held richly in esteem
Appearing in the Lists that mark the men
Who slumber in the Sleep that knows no dream.

My Friends are slipping past me one by one,
And leaving me to justify their death. . . .
O ! may my strength be equal to the task,
O ! may I do their work while I have breath.

I know I am not what I might have been,
That I have oft proved wanting in the Test . . .
Yet may I be a worthy Friend to *them*
Ere I—like them—sink grimly into rest !

France, 1916.

Life

At least I *live*. Emotion's fiercest winds
Sweep through my soul.
Sometimes my heartstrings play the gayest chimes—
Sometimes a toll.

I am not stagnant. All my Being thrills ;
A raptured song
Resounds throughout my Self with varied tones
The whole day long.

At least I live : I am not stagnant. Though
My joy or pain
O'erwhelms me with the terror of despair—
'Tis not in vain.
So, when oppress'd with fervour let me say :
" To-morrow I shall sing a richer lay ! "

Mesnil Bouche, 27th September, 1916.

Prayer

In years to come when Youth's few joys are sped
And snow-white hairs are sprinkled o'er my head,
Oh, God, may I be able thus to speak :
" I have improved each day, or week by week,
And year by year I have come nearer Thee."
Then, when the Great End comes, grant that I see
My children fair chaste women—upright men ;
Then shall I know I have not lived in vain.

Edinburgh, 1914.

Comparisons

Here through the rotting window is a steading,
Deserted, tumble-down, with odours vile. . . .
'Way back at home (where She may now be treading)
Are fragrant woods and flow'rs and things worth while.

Out here the sky, convuls'd with martial thunder,
And valleys brimming full with awful dead. . . .
Back there, there is the autumn's golden wonder,
The mellow beauty when the sun is sped.

Out here there is the ghastly devastation,
The cry of pain, the wail of dull despair. . . .
At home there's love and laughter, fascination,
There's joy and life and glowing embers there !

Out here there is the strain that knows no telling,
The all-night vigil fighting heavy sleep.
At home I often find my thoughts are swelling—
And that is why I sometimes dream—and weep !

France. Maismé Bouché, 24th September, 1916.

To-day

I SING no more the doughty deeds of yore,
  Which make each page of history so great ;
My Muse needs not to search in ancient lore
  Proud days of fame and glory to narrate.

The heroes old that used to wake my lyre
  To eulogies of epoch-making men
No longer fill my songs with wondrous fire :
  More recent warriors inspire my pen.

I sing TO-DAY : the valour and the might,
  The roar of guns, the splendour of the fray,
Where men die bravely, fighting for the right ;
  I sing of women kneeling down to pray.

My songs proclaim great sacrifice and rich ;
  The march of feet, the rousing roll of drums ;
I dream of scenes triumphant ; cheering, which
  Will greet returning Braves when Vict'ry comes.

Sing then, my Muse : be proud of those who go
  Our Britain's honour nobly to protect !
Rejoice, O waiting women : learn to know
  That those who go when Called are God's elect !

Edinburgh, 1914.

Adieu !

ADIEU !—My say is said, the last word wrote ;—
Here *you* begin, the critic of my work.
And if you think that talent here may lurk,
O Reader dear, I pray of you to say it !

But if 'tis otherwise, I pray of you—
Don't be *too* harsh !—And now adieu !

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